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Orientation to Ontario

ISLAMOPHOBIA

Islamophobia is fear of, hatred toward or prejudice against Muslims or the religion of Islam. Islamophobia can result in discrimination, verbal abuse, physical attacks and even systemic injustice such as barriers to education, employment, housing and more. Islamophobia can intersect with other forms of oppression, such as racial prejudice which means Muslim individuals from certain ethnic backgrounds, such as Arabs or South Asians, experiencing compounded discrimination. This primarily religious discrimination targets Muslims based on their religion and often stereotypes them as a threat or associates them with terrorism. In Canada, this prejudice has taken the form of physical violence, verbal abuse and discriminatory policies.

WHAT ARE SOME STEREOTYPES ABOUT ISLAM AND MUSLIMS?

All Muslims Are Arabs

Fact: Islam is a global religion with followers from all races and nationalities. While many people associate Islam with the Middle East, the majority of Muslims live in countries like Indonesia, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Only about 20% of the world's Muslim population is Arab.

Islam Is a Violent Religion

Fact: Islam is a religion that teaches peace and compassion and has 1.8 billion followers. Like other religions, it promotes kindness, charity and respect for others. Acts of violence or terrorism committed by individuals who claim to represent Islam, or any other faith, do not reflect the true

teachings of those religions.

Muslim Women Are Oppressed

Fact: Many Muslim women are doctors, teachers, business leaders and politicians, succeeding in various fields while upholding their personal beliefs. Some choose to wear the hijab, or head scarf, as a symbol of their identity, faith and empowerment, not oppression. Around the world, Muslim women are breaking barriers, leading in science, education and politics, and challenging stereotypes.

WHY IS ISLAMOPHOBIA HARMFUL?

Islamophobia causes harm because it leads to discrimination, hate crimes, and mental health concerns.

Discrimination: Muslims may face unfair treatment in schools, workplaces and public spaces due to Islamophobia. For example, they can be denied jobs or harassed because of their religion or appearance. According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, many Muslims report being passed over for promotions or assignments due to their religious identity, especially women who wear the hijab.

Black Muslims and Muslim women who wear the hijab face a heightened level of Islamophobia. These intersections of race, gender and religion are identified as gendered Islamophobia and anti-black Islamophobia.

Hate Crimes: Physical attacks, threats and property damage committed against Muslim

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people because of their religion are classified as hate crimes. These incidents are often motivated by fear and ignorance. According to the National Council of Canadian Muslims, from 2016 to 2021, Canada witnessed the highest number of Muslims killed in targeted, hate-motivated attacks among all the G7 countries.

Mental Health Impact: Negative comments, discrimination and exclusion can lead to anxiety, stress, depression and trauma. Islamophobia can lead to everything from rude comments from passing strangers on the street to shouted threats on public transit to someone pulling off a woman's hijab in the supermarket. This kind of everyday harassment can affect how people feel about themselves and their safety. Such experiences (and reports about them) can increase fear, putting people on alert at all times and leading to isolation and in some cases post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

In response to rising Islamophobia, the Canadian government introduced an anti-racism strategy in 2019. **"Building a Foundation for Change: Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy 2019–2022"** explicitly names Islamophobia as a form of discrimination addressed by the strategy. The government has also enacted laws to counter online hate speech and cyberbullying, including expanding penalties for those promoting hate against Muslims.

Organizations like the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) are key players in addressing Islamophobia. They offer legal support, document hate crimes and organize community-building events to promote interfaith dialogue. They also deliver anti-Islamophobia workshops to schools, workplaces and communities across Canada.

WHAT IS ANTI-ISLAMOPHOBIA?

Anti-Islamophobia refers to actions, beliefs and efforts aimed at challenging and disrupting discrimination, prejudice and hostility directed toward Muslims and Islam. Anti-Islamophobia work includes educational awareness, legal protection, advocacy services and other equity-based initiatives that encourage inclusivity and counter hate speech, violence and harassment targeting

Muslims.

How to Be an Ally

Individuals can support anti-Islamophobia in the following ways:

- Learn about Islam and the diversity within Muslim communities. Promoting understanding can reduce stereotypes and fear.
- Speak out against discrimination in conversations, in person, online or in the media. It is essential to counter false narratives with facts. This helps create a safer space for everyone.
- Support policies that protect religious freedom.
- Report any Islamophobic incidents to the authorities in schools, the workplace or human rights organizations. This ensures that these incidents are documented and addressed.
- Stand in solidarity with individuals or communities targeted by Islamophobia.
- Build friendships with people from different cultures and religions to break down barriers and build trust.

Reporting Islamophobia

In Canada, individuals who experience Islamophobic harassment, abuse or violence have several legal options:

1. File a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) for discrimination based on religion.
2. Report hate crimes or violence to local police services.
3. Report online incidents of hate speech to relevant platforms or authorities.

In addition to these official options, you should also report Islamophobic hate crimes using the [National Council of Canadian Muslims](#) (NCCM) incident reporting form. NCCM advocates for Canadian Muslims who have experienced anti-Muslim discrimination, hate or bias. The organization will review the incident and, if it falls within its mandate, follow up to discuss further steps.

DID YOU KNOW?

When Islam was founded 1400 years ago, it formalized and codified comprehensive inheritance rights for women in both religious and legal terms. Islam was the first religion to do so.

Islamophobia also targets individuals who are perceived to "look" Muslim based on stereotypical narratives. As a result, even those who are not Muslim—such as Sikhs and non-Muslim Arabs—may experience Islamophobia, highlighting the role of appearance in anti-Muslim prejudice.

KEY RESOURCES

Canadian Human Rights Commission: chrc-ccdp.gc.ca
211 Ontario

This telephone helpline directs callers to legal and mental health services in their local area. The 211 service is now available across Canada. The 211 service in Ontario has a website where you can search for services.

Sisters Project: cbc.ca

Alia Youssef developed the Sisters Project in December 2016 to combat the one-dimensional and stereotypical representations of Muslim women.